

Crosscurrents

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Crosscurrents

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Editor's Note

“...life is like the surf, so give yourself away like the sea.”

– *Y Tu Mamá También*

In this issue of Crosscurrents, we have a collection of work that, much like the ocean, is varied in mood: sometimes calm, sometimes tense, and sometimes playful. It is our hope that page after page, just like wave after wave, it will wash over you, leaving a lasting impression.

These pages demonstrate the creativity and talent to be found within our community, though by no means exhaust it. Because submissions so greatly outnumber pages, we found ourselves awash in a flood of interesting and exciting work from which we reeled in those that pulled the strongest. What you now have before you is the result of our team's effort to assemble a varied and engaging volume with currents that carry you through its dips and swells, to foreign shores and back.

Amber Catford-Robinson

Amber Catford-Robinson



elizabeth hughes – *untitled*

guest contributor

C. Rosalind Bell

I am not a bad person. There's plenty good things people used to say about me. Plenty. For one thing, I used to could fix anything: toasters, watches, cars...I loved me some cars. I had three one time. Mama was always fussing at me about cluttering up her back yard with all that heap of junk...but she didn't really mean nothing by it...fact of the matter, I'm the son taught her how to drive in one of them cars...the '59 Bonneville...Pontiac...as a matter of fact...they don't make them no more...Vistas...big old thighs just like a woman. Pretty, too. Color of the sea...suck you right in, that thing was so pretty. But she was hard too. Yeah, I'm telling you, you can ask anybody, they'll tell you. Baby Ray? Oh yeah, that boy knew how to work with his hands. He had something like the spirit in his hands. Lay his hands on anything...make it work.

I'm all right. Now. That statement there is what you call a half-truth. Like the truth is in there but it ain't all the way in there. I don't mind telling you though, because I'm all right with it. Now. I wasn't always like this here. I don't know what people say about me when you ask them now. That's why I would prefer it if people who want to know something about me, ask about what I was like back, you know...back before when they had plenty good things to say about me, back before I went away. Back before all them stairs in my head crumbled.

One day, all day, into the night Mamma turning up the dust

with her worry it's so strong. I got to get out of there. I'm wanting to go to Lake Charles, see my kin folks, Gerta and Henry and they two children in Lake Charles. I ain't seen them since I been back from Nam...they special to me, Gerta and Henry, and I got it in my mind to tell them yeah, I made it back, safe and sound and, fact of the matter I wanted to tell Gerta thank you for them packages she sent me...full to the top with her pecan candy (big, fat pecans straight from they tree in the back yard), and brittle and that little Bible and them Methodist Church Upper Rooms, the ones with the daily lesson in it (I didn't never get a chance to read them though). Plus the main reason I was going visit is Gerta and Henry got plenty of sense. Plenty of understanding about the world that escape most everybody else I know. I could talk to them about things. I always did. And that night I got plenty on my mind. I mean it's rocking with so much stuff I can't keep still hardly. Can't talk to Mama and them about it.

"Baby, you supposed to leave that stuff over there. You home now. Don't look at me like that."

They say I'm drinking too much. Hell, what's too much? "You not the same Baby Ray what left here. You done changed."

I knew how to drink before I left way from around here. People know everything. They know everything about me. They don't know shit.

I stopped up in Opelousas before I got to Lake Charles. Went by Muriel's Place. What she do with a hamburger. My, my, my. She toast the bun on the grill, but it's the butter, I'm thinking that makes the difference. And she browns her onions, let the sugar out, you know. I stopped there, got me something to eat...something to wash it down with. I played some cards... A saloon in the back of

her place...couldn't concentrate...unwrapped a little lady's leg (fine as cat hair she was) from around mine, told her hold it for me, I'd be back. Bet she still there waiting.

I can tell it now. When I got back in the car, I felt like Why I'm in Opelousas? Where Mama and Daddy? I sat there for the longest. It was so damn dark. I looked around me...lights every now again if a car passed by me. Lake Charles. Lake Charles. Lake Charles. I need to get to Lake Charles. I need to get to Lake Charles. A woman passed by with a man just looking at me. Y'all don't know me. Keep walking, keep walking, I'm thinking. Don't look at me. Stop looking at me. When they passed, I let my window down a crack. The cold whipped my cheek, slapped some tears out of me. I grabbed it...couldn't hold on to it. Couldn't hold on to a damn thing. I was losing my breath. I started up the car. The trees, them big old oak trees, when they be naked like they was that night, well, in the dark they look like they coming after you. They looked like creatures to me...all hobbled and doubled up on they self...knobby arms reaching out to get me. I was dripping sweat. That made me colder. I got out of there. Not quick enough though. I heard something go Crack! Like the fire popping out of a gun. I duck under the dashboard. Ain't nothing but my muffler pouting and pooting. I used to never would of drove no car sound like that. I could take a rattle trap and make that bad boy hum. Used to could. That's why them boys in Nam loved them some Ray. I fixed up the vehicles – made them sound just like you and me on the inside... quiet like...still...sound like ain't nobody coming.

I don't know what time it is when I hit Lake Charles. I ain't got my watch with me, you know. Time don't mean too much to me no more. It's still dark though...I know that. A place take on

a different theme at night. Not just them live oaks either. Take for instance a blinking light. In the daytime that light don't mean nothing. I mean, yeah, people stop and look this way and that, but they don't pay it too much nevermind. Take that same light in the darkness and you got you something else. I don't care if it's red or yellow. That flash be talking to you at night. "I see you." "What you doing, Ray?" Stuff like that.

When I come to Boulevard and Mill, right by Combre's Funeral Home...that's my marker, the funeral home, I know I'm damn near to Gerta and Henry house when I see that corner...the home of the quick and the dead because the folks it belong to live there too... when I come to that corner that's where I see that flashing light and I wonder. I stop even though it's a yellow light...I stop at the corner of the quick and the dead in the middle of the night and I just wonder.

I could say I didn't call Gerta and them because I was so hell bent on surprising them...but I don't think that's the truth...not the whole truth any way. I did want to just show up...didn't want no special preparation for me or nothing like that...but the real goodness to life truth is I didn't know where I was going when I left Port Allen. I ain't had no idea. Not one iota.

How I really know I made it to Lake Charles is by the smell. My nose'll start to twitching when it come up against the sweet, (and I'm talking about thick sweet, not sugar sweet...that's not what I'm talking about...I'm saying sweet like it's so good before you know it your toes be criss crossing and curling up on one another) sweet, smoky burn of the meat roasting on West's Barbeque Pit. Even before I come to the corner of the quick and the dead, I can find that sweet smoky. He a mean old thing. Mr. West. Won't hardly

raise his head to speak to people. Nobody care though. That line be all the way to the street. His wife steady be knocking on the window from inside they house.

“Please stay in the designated line area. I didn’t plant those flowers to be trampled on. Don’t you people see the red line?”

People wave and nod they head at her. Some of them. Most of them turn they back to her siddity ass and mash they foot on a Petunia for the hell of it.

“Who she think she is?”

“Tell your husband get a real store ‘stead of people having to so-say trample through your yard to get a goddamn rib!”

Still, they keep on coming. Gerta won’t go her. She say what sense it make to give your money to someone who won’t even acknowledge you? Say it’s bad enough with having to deal with white folks without having to take that mess from your own kind. Plus she say who want to eat something cooked by somebody who acts like they don’t like people? She doesn’t care how good it tastes, say there has to be something wrong with it if you don’t throw some love into the pot. See? That’s why I love me some Gerta.

I want to stop right here and tell you about Amanda, my so-called wife. I ought to. But I ain’t ready yet. Now is not the time. I’m speaking on more pleasant things, like my cousins, Gerta and Henry, people who know love is like a mountain, you got to climb it to get to the top.

So I take in the sights along the Boulevard, (the real name, the whole of the street is Enterprise Boulevard and on this side of Broad Street, that’s street what separate us from them, on this side of Enterprise Boulevard, the side I’m familiar with), I see Toussaint’s ESSO station, too bad they ain’t open yet, I stop there even if I

don’t need no gas...they so fast with the windshield wiping and the oil check, they act like they in a race and I ain’t never seen no uniforms neat and clean and pressed to the nth degree like at Toussaint’s...and I be checking for dirty fingernails too...them boys pass my test every time. There’s J.W Taxi Stand, he, that’s J.W., I’m talking about take Gerta and Henry children to kinnygarden every day. The Palace Theatre. Dot’s. That’s a bar. I been in there. Plenty times. Gerta don’t know though. I usually stop in on my way out of town. On my way back home. That way I ain’t got no telltale signs on me while I’m at they house. Now they don’t mind liquor or nothing like that...that’s not what I’m saying. I’m saying they don’t like you to go out to no juke joints and get your liquor. They themselves got a whole cabinet full of liquor. So drinking ain’t the problem. They what you called Proper People. But me? I’m young. And I likes to be with the people, you know? But I seen what Gerta them was talking about too onetime. Seen a ambulance pulled up in front of the place, a couple of police sirens too. I ain’t stop though. Not that time. I had my juice in a paper bag underneath the seat so it wasn’t like I just had to stop. So I got on the highway went on home. That’s almost for true. I stopped at Ball’s. Got me some fried chicken. Cute lil thing working there. I just be playing with her. I’m a married man. I just be winking...just be playing. See that Amanda? She not one for playing.

Forget Amanda. I’m in Lake Charles, like I said, I made my way past Pryces’ Drug Store. Theriot’s Grocery. Vallery Hotel. Supreme Life Insurance, Henry people own that one. You want to see a fire come out of Gerta’s head? Call the name of Henry people out loud. Henry used to work for them...til the conclusion finally come to him that it wasn’t no sense battling with Gerta...she was right

(Gerta always right), his uncle wasn't about to give him a piece of the business – not today, not tomorrow, not 10,000 tomorrows, he was a mule, same as the other agents. So after all that war between the two of them, Henry and Gerta, Henry say he just walked in they house one day and told Gerta “Did my last debit account. I'm through with it.” And that was that. Gerta say he ain't never once even mentioned it again. She said she rubbed his feet and soaked them in her flower oils and whatnot and washed his feet like he was Jesus Christ or somebody. I know she was a happy somebody. Gerta can't stand them people.

So now I'm in front they house. Gerta and Henry. It's twilight. So nice and peaceful. Ain't nobody stirring. This the best time of the day if you ask me. It's just you and the Lord. If you believe in that kind of thing. I never met so many people don't believe til I was in Nam. Look like all the questions everyb ody ever had about all that stuff they taught us in Sunday School...all the stuff that didn't make no sense and the teachers couldn't make us understand (cause come to find out they don't understand it theyselves) how you going part the Red Sea? Me and Michael Gradnigo spent half a day telling a bathtub full of water to part. We got tired of asking God to do it for us...so we tried it and nothing happened except his sister Elizabeth banging on the door talking about how we going to get it when they mama come home...wasting all that water...not letting nobody in to pee.

Well, look like to me all that nonsense we learned in Sunday School come face to face with the facts of life while we was in the jungle. In another way though, I don't even much blame God for disappearing or maybe not even showing up in the first place. War ain't no place nobody in they right mind ought to be. And let's

say He could part the Red Sea...well, that's one thing...but I sure wasn't going to put my money on him stopping them grenades and bullets and booby traps...I sure ain't found the opportunity to witness Him stopping none of that. Of course not all the soldiers feel like that. You got to watch who you talking to. Get yourself in a conversation with one of them Toteters...man you in for something. God can't do no wrong. Then they want to kill you if you challenge them. Mama praying for me hard since I been back. Crying and praying. Praying and crying.

“What they did with my baby? What they did with my son? You not the same

boy what left here. I still love you, Ray...you my flesh and blood. I got to love you...but you just not the same son what left from round here, baby. And please stop looking at me like that.”

I can't take so much of that, you know. I told her she wasn't the same mama I left here neither. Slap. Damn...I didn't see that one coming. Straight out of wailing her precious little heart out to the back of her hand right across my face. I grabbed it. Instinct, you know. Got to always be on your toes for the enemy. It's a matter of which one of us going to lose our life. Me? I stay on guard. Said I was hurting her. Twisting away from me, I let it go. I let it go. I see. That's Momma. Crying. Shaking her head. I'm sorry. I let it go.

And Daddy? He hardly look at me. He talks to me, but his eyes not on me. I can't drink nothing at they house. I keep me a paper bag though. In my room I got my juice in my paper bag. That's how I get to sleep. Not all the time. Sometimes I stay up for a few days and when I get to sleep, man oh man...that's the best

sleep. But I don't do that too often. Don't nobody hardly want to talk to you when you been up for three days. That's all right with me though. I know how to keep my own self company. Can't go around depending on nobody. That's for sure. Take Amanda. Henny Youngman...he ain't said much funny when he came out to so-call entertain us...but he sure made me know he knew what he was talking about when he said...“take my wife.”

There I go again. See how women get you all sidetracked?

Gerta house is landscaped. She got flowers and little shrubberies all around the place. I was there in the first part of the spring one time and it look like a hurricane...a hurricane with color. Pink roses, red roses, yellow roses, white roses, purple glads, biggest daisies you ever want to see...and that ain't the half of it. She keeps a good house. Course she got herself some help. Told Henry she wasn't working eight hours a day...(sometime ten when she stay after school and help the children Momma and Daddy read too) and then come home and have to do it again...so they pay the hairdresser lady (the bootleg one...she lost her license so she can only do hair on the side, you know...don't ask me how she lost her license...Gerta said it had something to do with that no good sonofabitch husband of hers...oh yeah, Gerta got a mouth on her yeah)...so they pay the hairdresser lady to come in twice a week. That help gives Gerta plenty time to be in there fooling around with her flowers in the front yard and her vegetables in the back.

You know what I wonder? I wonder why people get all crazy-like all suspicious and things about people who tell them they be hearing voices and things and such like that? Everybody hear voices. What's that you think going round in your head at this precise moment if it ain't voices or a particular voice? Can't

nobody keep they mind on one thing for too long. Try it. You can't do it. Why? Them voices. “Wonder what time it is?” “I want some lemon icebox pie.” “I forgot to pick up the nails.” Stuff like that be interfering with whatever it is you want to concentrate on. Ask me. I know.

When I pull up in front of Gerta's and them I was sleepy as a half-dead trout.. My legs was throbbing something awful. Especially that right one. A piece of it not here with me no more, at least not where you can see it, and that's where it hurt me the most. You can't tell it in my pants...but I feel it gone all the time. And when it's talking to me like it was that night...well, it was morning, but it was still dark like the night...when that not here with me part start to messing with me...let's just say I got hell to pay. I took my pills, but I don't know why. They stopped working I don't know how long ago. I need to get inside the house you know. That bad boy, that right leg don't want to get out of the car. Stiffening on me something awful. I swing it around, can't hardly bend it without begging the good Lord for mercy...(that's habit...he ain't no good...look what kind of condition I'm in...Mama don't have to tell me I ain't the same Ray what left here...hell, I ain't crazy, you know...I see how the people be looking at me...waiting for me to say something out the ordinary and things like that...anything Baby Ray do worth a phone call. I give up on caring what they say. Ain't none of them been in my skin).

I don't know how underneath my fingernails got so dirty...but they was, and I can't stand that. I don't care how pretty a woman carry herself. I don't like no dirt up underneath the nails. Hell, I worked on cars all my life and ain't never had none...I go to the bank and I want to scream...teller man handing me my money

with that caked-in dirt...Nah, don't tell me nothing about that kind of thing...I knew I had to get that gunk off of me. Plus that bad boy leg...all I wanted to do was get into they tub. Gerta and Henry got the deepest tub I've ever seen...feel like you sitting in the bottom of the Pacific. That's why I was banging that door. I needed to get my legs submerged because that's the only way, here lately, I can get some peace. Hot water. Epsom Salt. Slide them in nice and gentle. I can't help but stare at that part of me. Gone. I catch myself wondering it it's going grow back. Hoping, you know. I prayed on it. Once. See ain't shit happened. I didn't mean to cause no ruckus. I just wanted me some relief.

Even before I balled up my fist to knock, I see that fat sausage next door peeping through her curtains. Guess she like me. Don't sleep much. I knock, but don't get no answer. Both they cars in the driveway. They in there. I try again. And again.

"Stop all that racket, you trying to wake up America?" That's the pink sausage banging on the window, talking.

* * *

Next thing I know I open my eyes and I search with my eyes for where I am. I don't know. I blink hard. Okay, this a mattress underneath me, it ain't the ground. I'm in a bed. What's them little eyes staring at me over there? Little, but cold, hard. Sitting up. I'm on alert before I know it. I know the price to be paid for picking up a so-called baby. I feel a breeze. Some curtains dancing on the floor with the sunlight. A whatnot stand in the corner by the door. Them eyes. I go closer, slow. It's some baby dolls, glass eyes, cold, hard all right...three pairs of them, legs crossed, sitting in the wingback just a looking at me. I don't want them looking at me. I turn them

around to face the back of the chair. They stiff, rigor mortis like... don't want to turn. I lay them down on they stomach.

This Gerta guest room I'm in. My shoes halfway under the bed, side-by-side. I look inside the left one, up near the top where the fleshy part of the foot go. Yep, it's still there. Amanda. Her picture. I scotch-taped it back together a second or two after I ripped the damn thing in half right after I heard what I heard about how she passed the time away good timing. I'm dancing with the Cong, my lady...she over here just dancing...fanning her tail...be all right if she'da kept it at the fan level. You got to look hard to see the tear. It's there though...crooked and jagged just like her. Why I'm still carrying her picture anyway, I ask myself? Why? How I got in this room? I swing my legs over the side and I'm still inside my pants.

How I got inside this house? It's so still. It's so still all I hear is the noise the world put out when everybody else is sleeping. Like a swarm of something...bees maybe...but far away. I just heard the refrigerator...sound like a baby burping. At Mama's house the floors creak talk all night. Don't nobody be walking on them or nothing...they just start creaking all by theyself. When I get back to Port Allen I'm a let Amanda go. That's all there is to that. I don't need no more of her shit. She couldn't wait for me. Just couldn't do it. You fool yourself long enough, you think you got yourself fooled. But you don't. Truth just like the Cong. Laying in wait. And it can wait as long as it take. I wasn't back here two seconds before folks telling me what I already seen when I looked her dead square in her eyes at the bus station when she came with Mama and Daddy to meet me.

interview with C. Rosalind Bell

You are a playwright as well as a writer of prose fiction. What can you say about drama or theater as an art form?

I can say that it is a life enhancer, a life changer as trite as that has come to seem. It seeps into people, it moves people. It places people in a darkened space and allows them to see the world in a different way, challenge some aspects of their assumptions; it gives them a place to laugh, to cry, to wonder.

You are originally from Louisiana. Has the northwest influenced your work?

It has. It frees. I love, love, love this area. I love the doom and gloom that we are about to get into. It's total writerly weather for me. And geographically, it's far enough away from the place I am writing about, which I prefer. Most of my writing contains biographical elements, and I find it easier to write about it when I am out of that place. And this weather suits me.

What can you say about your writing process?

That it is a process. If I had a dime for the people who come up and say, you ought to write my story. I always turn it back and say, No, you ought to write your story.... The process is writing something every day, but for me it doesn't have to be something that I'm working on. It just has to be something. I cannot wait for inspiration. No writer can.

What do you think is the function of art as far as instigating change or instilling awareness?

I think that it is that: It should be the instigator of change and instiller of awareness. I think that is the function of art. I also believe in Art for Art's Sake. Of course art does something else too. It "entertains," but that direct instigation of change can be one of art's major functions in society. We need more of it.

Louisiana native and Tacoma resident C. Rosalind Bell is the University of Puget Sound's 2011 Endowment of the Humanities Dolliver Artist in Residence. The author of three plays, Rosalind was awarded a City of Tacoma Arts Grant in 2009 and received a 2010 commission from Northwest Playwrights Alliance. One of her short stories, *First Friend*, was adapted into the short film "Tootie Pie," which was screened at the 2006 Seattle International Film Festival and shown on PBS' KCTS. One of her screenplays, *Le Cirque Noir*, about the rise and fall of the Duvaliers of Haiti, received a staged reading at the 2008 Downtown Los Angeles Film Festival and an excerpt of her novel -in-progress, *Love, Me*, was featured in City Arts Tacoma magazine in May 2009. Rosalind was also named an innovator of 2008 by national race and politics newsmagazine *Colorlines*.

Rosalind is a director of the August Wilson Play Reading Series produced by Northwest Playwrights Alliance/Broadway Center/Washington State History Museum/The Conversation. She is a member of Macondo, a Writers Workshop conceived by author Sandra Cisneros in San Antonio. She has been a writer in residence at Lincoln High School's Lincoln Center and will be a Visiting Artist in Virginia in February 2012.

In addition to her many other endeavors, Rosalind is currently hard at work on a cookbook.

Table of Contents

Guest Contributor / *C. Rosalind Bell*

Microsoft Word	1
<i>polly membrino</i>	
Untitled	2
<i>claire gordon</i>	
Hadrian's Patience	3
<i>hannah fattor</i>	
Untitled	5
<i>abbie baldwin</i>	
Chrysalis	6
<i>kelsey vogan</i>	
Folsom	7
<i>ellie page</i>	
Where Have We Gone?	14
<i>tedra hamel</i>	
Dancing with Death, or on Losing Men Forever	15
<i>asya pokrovskaya</i>	
Untitled	18
<i>dylan witwicki</i>	
Sleeping Season	19
<i>rowan carrick</i>	
Bridged Blue	20
<i>adam krauland</i>	
Penis in a Public Bathroom	21
<i>will hamel</i>	
The Pear	25
<i>david pendleton</i>	
SELECT WORKS	
Silly Boy Shakes Hands with Quiet	28
<i>austin okopny reviewed by john wesley</i>	

B Cup	34
<i>hannah johnson reviewed by becky frehse</i>	
Game 7	36
<i>jack todd reviewed by suzanne warren</i>	
Helga – A Water Baby	42
<i>cleo maul</i>	
The Woman With No Face	43
<i>kate fujimoto</i>	
Untitled	45
<i>morgana hardy</i>	
Untitled	46
<i>jane cornell</i>	
Epilogue	47
<i>justine mcdaniel</i>	
Crochet in Color	50
<i>megan chambers</i>	
Untitled	56
<i>hannah vernon</i>	
393 Minutes (Inside the Oregon State Insane Asylum)	57
<i>crystal ingatowski</i>	
Seeing	59
<i>daniel pendleton</i>	
Untitled	60
<i>Symantha Lee Harkins</i>	
Another Shade of Blue	61
<i>kristin brynsvold</i>	
Basket Weaving: Self Portrait	67
<i>jill sanford</i>	
Fairy Tea Party	68
<i>liza holtz</i>	
Braided Rivers	69
<i>juliette witous</i>	
Poem #638 (A Collaborative Effort)	71
<i>jared stoltzfus</i>	

Microsoft Word

polly membrino

There may be nothing so demoralizing
and disheartening
and confirming of your lack of well-organized thought
than the blinking line
at the top of a blank Office Document.



Hadrian's Patience

hannah fattor

In that sopping meadow, green and cold,
he takes hold of my hand
and presses it against the wall.
The rocks come to my shoulder. I brush rough stone,
close eyes like greenening, decaying, rusting coins,
and try to hear something beyond the rush of grass.

There is the fecund, dizzying scent of grass,
heavy in the air made sharp with cold.
My lips taste like frozen coins,
feel numb under my hand.
He bends slowly, picks up a small grey stone
and throws it high over the wall.

He watches it fall behind that old, mossy wall
collapsing back into the grass,
blending with the earth and stone,
long abandoned out in the cold,
no longer defended by a warrior's hand
which would stand and fight, at the end of the day, for a few coins.

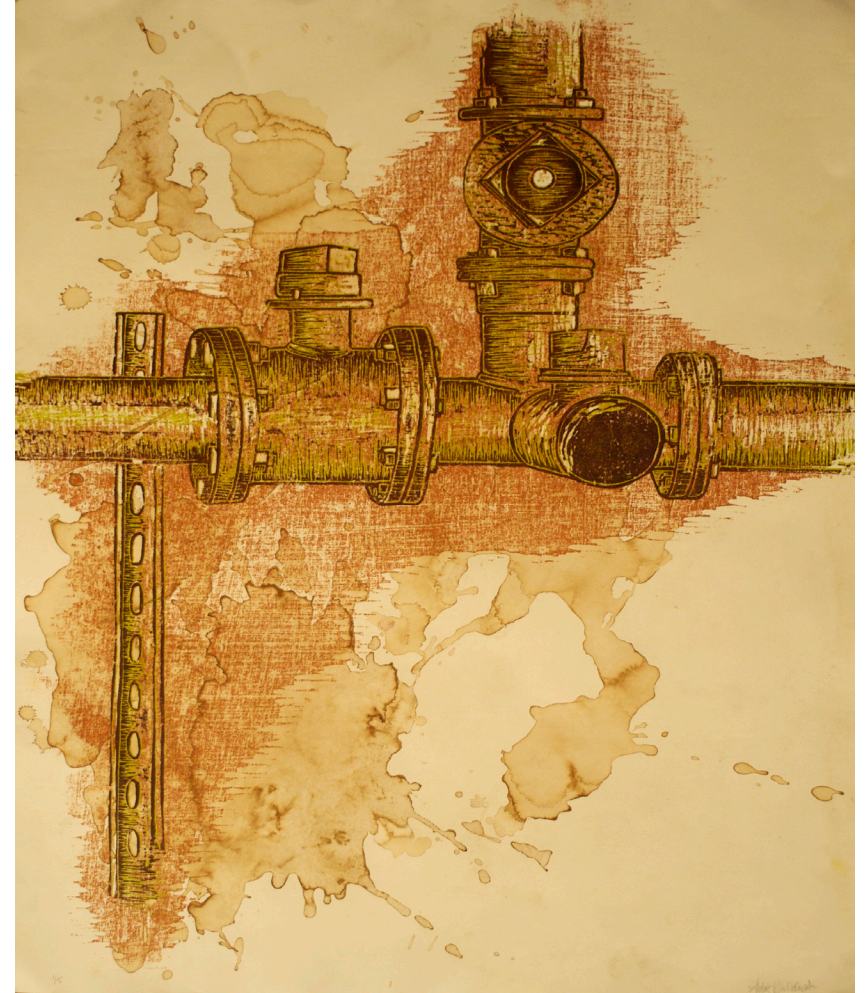
I stoop to find some old coins,
buried perhaps in the muck against this ancient wall,

but his fingers stop my questing hand.
Come, he says, lie with me in the grass.
I look at the mud and the still-damp green. It's cold,
I whisper, let's sit on the stone.

Laughing at my weakness, he lifts me onto the stone.
His teeth gleam like tarnished coins.
His nose, hands, breath – all are cold.
We sit not touching on top of that wall,
staring out at an empty, trembling lake of grass
until, by inches, I give him my hand.

I say, I know this isn't your real hand.
His face turns toward me and it is stone.
I can hear him breathing like a breeze through grass,
the frozen gold of his armor as bright as fresh coins.
I am still here, he says. I still guard this wall.
His voice is so alone. Even the sound of his words is cold.

His pale hand reaches for his eyes, covered by copper coins,
the wind roars over the grass, slams the wall,
and I am left holding nothing but a stone, feeling nothing but cold.



abbie baldwin – *untitled*



Folsom *ellie page*

BEEEEEEEEEP.

6:00 am. Breakfast: one black piece a' toast, two undercooked eggs, four greasy sausages. Sometimes there's coffee, but drinkin' it's a risk. The guards find it entertainin' to deposit their cigarette butts in a fresh brew. Food aside, breakfast is my favorite time a' day cuz there's so many people to watch. Solitary confinement's lonely. I always had lots a' friends in school. I wasn't in no gang or nothin' like most a' the blacks at Silvercrest High. I tried to make mama proud. But I don't try so much anymore; I always end up disappointin' myself.

I wish I'd never come to Sacramento. I haven't seen Mama since I left Georgia twelve years ago. She called me a couple times, asked my cousins how I was, but she had no interest in seein' me after I started workin' with my cousin, Elvan. Mama warned me I was gonna turn out like Pap. She said Elvan was just like him: stupid and dangerous. All he was good at was attractin' women and gettin' in trouble. Even Aunty Isabel called Mama and told her that Elvan was in trouble and that she knew cuz she was his mama. Although I was tired of bein' poor and wanted to make some real money, I never woulda left if I hadn't a gotten the phone call from the dope runners that used to know Pap. They claimed I was responsible for Pap's unpaid dues, threaten'd to hurt Mama and me if I didn't start workin' with Elvan. And Elvan can be mighty

forceful himself with his broad shoulders and blank gaze.

I didn't intend to follow in my pap's footsteps, but a couple years into it after I'd paid Pap's dues, I didn't feel no obligation to fulfill my civic duty that I was neglectin' accordin' to Mama. It no longer mattered if the money was honest or stolen from the poor bastard Elvan disposed of on the way ta' lunch. And I'd earned my own debts by then, debts that can never be paid. I s'pose I could say heredity's to blame; I was born with bad genes – destined to a lifetime of imprisonment. I figure it doesn't matter if I spend my days runnin' on the outside, constantly lookin' over my shoulder, or savorin' my daily hour a fresh air within the confines of a concrete barricade, the gun pressed to some other felon's back.

“REPORT TO THE REC YARD. REPORT TO THE REC YARD.”

The guards maintain quick trigger fingers in the rain, always suspectin' some a the guys are gonna attempt to slip away in the dark of the perilous muck. So most the guys don't like to venture outside when it's rainin'; they prefer ta' stay outta' sight a the guard tower, but I like the cool damp. Never got much rain in Georgia. Here at Folsom it rains every once in a while. There's nothing like runnin' in a downpour. Most a' the time I run alone cuz the guys in orange steer clear of those of us wearin' the green uniforms; we're marked for death.

The first time I worked with Elvan and the runners that threatened Mama I knew I'd end up wearin' a green uni. The first time Elvan instructed me to transport eight ounces of crack across the border I knew I'd never go back to Georgia. The first time I was paid twelve grand in cash I knew that I'd never again be a free man. It wasn't that I was enamored with the money I was earnin'.

I was more astounded and horrified by the greed a' the drug lords. They make more money cheatin' their runners than sellin' their product. Every guy in the business has to pay off his pap's debts or his cousin's, but can never seem to pay back his own; there's endless travel expenses and the money you owe for the coke they accuse you of stealin', as well as the “initiation fee” they charge for takin' you in. It becomes a family business. Mama always used to say Pap was an indentured servant whose contract never expired. Although at 25 I was tired a' dealin' crack, once you're contracted you sign your life away. That's what Pap told me the last time I ever saw him. Whether fearin' the betrayal of a brother in the trade or bein' tracked by the feds, freedom is unattainable; a privilege long abandoned with your honor and pride. After six years a' runnin' back an' forth across the border I knew my luck'd soon run out. But I never expected to get caught by the feds. Most of us drugs runners don't die in prison.

“CELL IN TEN MINTUES. LINE UP IN TEN.”

The forty-five minutes we're allowed in the yard five days a week comes and goes like it never happened. Sometimes when I feel my muscles cramp from all the sittin' I do some push-ups in my cell. There isn't no T.V. or nothin' so exercise is really the only thing to do. It's almost a competition 'round here – see who can get the most ripped. The reward is that you don't get beat up or taken advantage of. But I don't have that problem anymore. It's good advice for the rookies; they take the most shit. I have to admit that I'm in better shape here at Folsom than I've ever been before. Maybe if I hadn't been so liquored up and coulda run more than a quarter mile without wheezin' I wouldn't have been caught. That's what I tell myself. If I'd been stronger, or smarter, or better

prepared, instead of taking a piss in a six-by-eight foot cell I'd be walking the streets, a free man. But Pap woulda told me that it's better I was caught, or I'd still be drivin' my cocaine-filled truck to Mexico, wishin' I was in prison. Maybe freedom's what Pap was thinkin' about before his best buddy capped him in the back after he admitted he wanted to quit dealin'. That's what I imagine, but I can't say for sure; his body was never found. At least at Folsom Mama will have no trouble findin' my body to burry.

That fateful day six years ago I sauntered into a convenient store bout twenty miles north a' the border. I'd planned to do a quick run and then return to the States the same day. I traditionally stayed with some of Elvan's friends a bit south a' the border, but I had no interest in shootin' up. After tryin' it a couple times I knew it wasn't for me; I never liked feelin' outta control. I hadn't transported in a while, but had done it so many times before that I felt overly relaxed. As I approached the counter to pay for my burrito and Sprite, the feds pulled into the market.

"IT'S TIME FOR KITCHEN DUTY. GET YOUR ASSES OUT HERE!"

Last week while scrubbin' the tiled kitchen floor I thought of the convenience store. Same smooth tile, same gray color. Afternoon chores was a good time a' day. Mama would be proud if she saw me on my hands and knees scrubbin' away, makin' the floor sparkle. But I prefer cookin' duty myself. I'm pretty good at it – thought about cookin' at Rusty Joe's Pub down in Georgia 'fore I was summoned by the drug mafia. Sometimes the guards allow the cooks to play a little Johnny Cash. Some a' the guys can relate to Mr. Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" more than others. Me, I'd never shoot nobody on purpose; it was an accident. That's what I told

Mama, but I don't think she believed me. She yelled so loud into the receiver that the officer standin' next to me stepped back. She said I was my pap's boy. I told her I did it for her, so we'd both be safe, but I s'pose she was tired a feelin' like she was second best ta' the coke trade.

I was thinkin' about what I woulda done differently as the two federal officers rushed into the store. They knew I was in there and they wanted me captured. I lifted up the back a' my shirt and slowly placed my hand on the semiautomatic Colt Elvan always made me carry in case of situations like this. I'd never fired it before and didn't plan on doin' so that day. It's funny how things never turn out the way you expect.

I wouldn't a' thought that the store clerk had a gun. But from his quick trigger finger it was obvious that he'd fired it before and was prepared to do so at any moment. I have no explanation for what I did other than I was scared shitless. And when a man is scared he does unreasonable things. I always thought I was a pretty levelheaded guy, but not that day. When I saw him whip out his gun and wondered how I was gonna fend off the approachin' feds I did the only thing I could think of. There was no silencer on Elvan's Colt, and when the shot reverberated through the air the feds quickened their pace. The first time I shot the gun I thought I'd feel powerful, completely in control, but as the blood flowed from the clerk's head I only felt regret; I'd defeated myself, again.

"TWENTY MINUTES, JOEY. THE PRIEST IS LATE FOR MASS."

A man can only disappoint himself so many times before he loses all hope of redemption. So I suppose it was fittin' that I was the first to see the priest. It was the day before it was scheduled to

happen and I'd been wearin' the green uni the longest of any a' the six guys on the row. A' course Mama is a good Christian woman and I never missed a Sunday since I was little, but I knew the priest couldn't absolve Pap's sins or my own. I was polite and said I was sorry for what I did, but it was too late. I didn't deserve God's grace.

Hidin' in the back a' the store near the Twinkies and refrigerated goods, I heard the ding a' the front door and knew the officers had entered the market. It was a bit like the movies. They told me to come out with my hands raised and drop my weapon. And like the brainless criminals in the movies, I didn't do either. Instead, I fired Elvan's Colt for the second time. I heard the officers talkin' and knew they were callin' for reinforcements. After repeatin' their spiel a second time in a more threatenin' tone and gettin' no results, they fired their first shot. I wondered if there was a way I could get around em' or if there was a back door. I saw no immediate escape routes, so for my next couple shots I peeked around the corner of the aisle and aimed at officer number one. I only meant to hit him in the leg or the arm, just wound him. But I hadn't had much practice shootin' before, so my aim wasn't the best. Some might say it was right on, but I refuse to think like that.

After the backup arrived I knew I'd been beat. There was no sense in takin' two or three more innocent lives before I got captured or killed myself. I surrendered, they tackled me, cuffed me, and strapped me in the van. On my way out I walked by a new pool a' blood formin' around the head of a heroic officer, killed on the job. Although remorseful that his kid would be forced to grow up without a pap, I was somewhat relieved to know that I'd soon be safe inside Folsom's walls. No more coke; no more fear; no more runnin'.

“ANY LAST WORDS?”

As they strapped me in and prepared the injection, I thought a' what I could possibly say. The case was black and white: smugglin' crack across the border, murdered a civilian, murdered an officer, young, black, male. There was nothin' more to explain. They didn't want to hear about Pap or that Elvan was murdered; stabbed six times by one of the bosses for stealin' a gram a' coke. They didn't care about the deception or bloodshed. I shook my head and tried to relax. I didn't feel no pain or nothin'; I deserved worse. As I closed my eyes for the last time I thought a' Mama. I thought a' the blue skies of Georgia and the sticky heat. And then, like the clerk and the officer, like Pap and Elvan, I didn't think no more.

“JOSEPH MCGOVERN. TIME OF DEATH: 10:47 AM.”

Dancing with Death, or on Losing Men Forever

asya pokrovskaya



It's a good sign,
when a sparrow walks into your bedroom,
death on two little legs,
in January. It's good
when you see signs everywhere.
On the second day,
my grandmother is mucking out a whole lifetime
of personal artifacts,
teasing apart the yellow papers with her moistened fingertips
and we all avoid eye contact.
They spill on to the table as we sip our tea, obediently.
Where did they go, the disappeared Jews
of these marriage certificates and birth certificates?
Where are the death certificates?
And all this time I thought my grandfather didn't have any family.
We read these careful letters in handwriting from another century,
the postcards are raindrops of blood on the linoleum
when someone cuts their finger slicing bread.

tedra hamel – *Where Have We Gone?*

Is this a joke
proletariat arise,
in the corner. It cannot be real.
Although the last one's are shaky,
and he misspelled words
and he lost his thought,
we read them, his letters, like anecdotes
about ourselves, the kind we like the most:
about how hard it is to sprout roots when your hair is graying,
about how the sky meets the mountains
and not the ground,
but the strings of your life, refuse to meet
anywhere.
Where do thoughts go when they are lost?
Do they break against the window glass,
or do they walk under the door,
like my sparrow?
Where do good fathers go? And good grandfathers
that warm our feet with their hands in the winter,
and call sparrows sparrows and point at jaybirds.
These good men, I learn, took antidepressants
and didn't do the dishes.
These good men never got the last word,
but spun quiet tales for us
as the snow creaked underfoot,
like a door opening and closing.
My grandmother yelled "Valka"
when he gasped his last breath,
the terrible irony of it:

he only weighed eighty pounds,
and looked like a Holocaust victim.
I talked about it with my sister by the vending machine.
I thought about how the tone didn't seem right,
too informal,
almost angry.
I was angry at myself for thinking about tone and irony.
On the second day,
my mother said,
you lost your father first
and now I've lost mine.
It should have been the other way around.
I looked out the window and remembered
how her blond hair had fallen down her back at the funeral
and I was embarrassed,
by how it gleamed
even in the rain.
I wouldn't look at her.
It's stupid to be embarrassed at funerals.
Maybe it should have been the other way around,
but it wasn't.
It's unfortunate but
I have a rivalry with the mother earth;
we love the same men,
but she always wins.



dylan witwicki – *untitled*

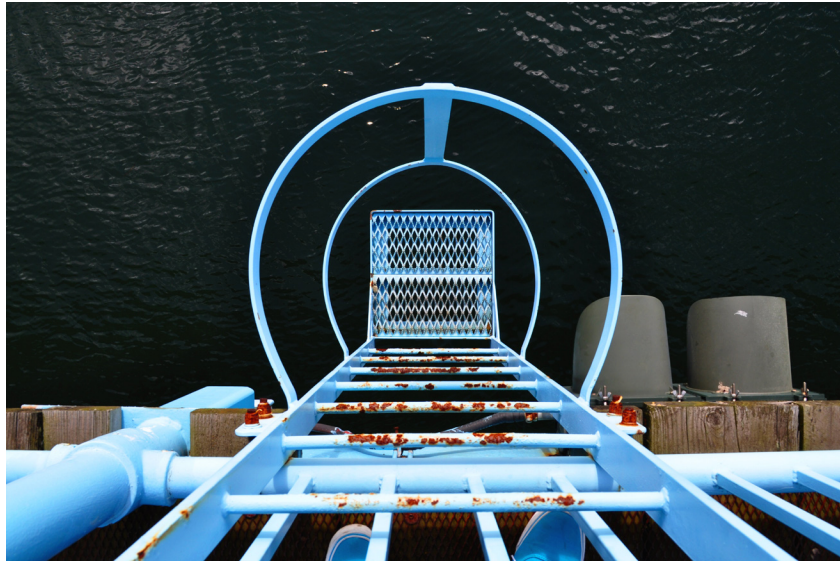
Sleeping Season

rowan carrick

We spoke softly.
And we spoke with broken breaths, and trailing sentences.
Your eyes stayed closed, most of the time,
Listening to my stories
About being seven years old and losing things
Before I needed them.

We talked about staying
In bed
For the rest of the year and
Hibernating,
Like a couple
Of bears in the snow.

I would have,
If I had known about winter.



adam krauland – *Bridged Blue*

Penis In A Public Bathroom *will hamel*

Shining white, chrome handles,
The lost land of modernity
Blazing and standing while the outside crumbles.
Impossibly clean, glistening,
Porcelain chilling the walls
Protected from the wind, locked from history.
I stepped slowly into the male bathroom.
Forty urinals in a line, and only
One other man far down the row that kept us from solitude;
I start the ritual in the heavy silence.
The mind burns.
Grueling, alone, the painful outside world screaming dead against
the deaf doors, a last escape, a refuge,
I wander darkly as the mud clings to me,
Exposed to the whiteness before me.
I have taken all experience and crashed in my brain the fuselage
leaking, waiting for fire to consume what is left...ticking, dripping,

atomic silence.

Then breaking through the brigade, stopping time in its tracks, the
iceberg plunges,

and I hear a sound so soft it could have only been imagined.

But it is a word – discernable, definite, human.

The other man is smirking in my ears' imagination.

The laws are manifest and they are broken,

I am tied by ritual and...intrigue.

So, softly, barely a whisper, but as custom louder than what went
before,

I mouth the word that broke the dead and reverberated in the lofts
of destruction...

penis.

The cold does not affect those who died in winter

Faith is fatiguing, and now I know now the solitude and fear of
wild men vulnerable in the trees with bears watching.

Everything has gone,

Everything is silent,

Except, of course, for the tinkling.

Eons must seem strange to their makers;

The mountains have long held their breath as they deteriorate,

And I have failed to breathe in my waiting.

Stones gather like vultures to end the breaths completely.

But the silence can be broken.

What is done can be undone.

The sound finds me – clearer, louder, stronger than before.

Penis.

I am grinning. The piss bounces off the urinal and hits my shins.

My eyes are locked to the silver handle and the tile wall behind it.

Ask and thou shall receive. So I clear my throat and answer.

The birds crowd in for their mates;

I make the waters meet and the strings vibrate as the sun rises in the
grass.

Our hearts are naked.

PENIS.

Whirring ticks fly past my face, the horses are straining,

My stream is full, vibrant with air waves crackling back and forth.

Staring back at me the porcelain sings,

The rain dives and the clouds shine forth.

Bless an ghaoth. Bless the wind, for it comes back.

PENIS!

Death came swiftly, but even swifter did the dust rise up in the
sandstorms,

The locusts rise out of the mist to eat the life away.

Standing against decay were those marble statues that could not
even

Outlast the echoing of evolution that burst emerging

Through the water and the deep, flashing through

White lights and stalls and a line of urinals in a men's bathroom in
a football stadium.

Let loose the dogs of war.

PENIS!!!!

The other guy leans back in my periphs, hinged back on his hips, breathing in, armed with leverage against the struggles of humankind.

PENIS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The walls are crumbing.
I grasp the porcelain and brace my esophagus.

PENIS!!

The halls ring, the people are restless, gasping for air.

PENIS!!

There is only one duty bestowed upon man and I embrace it.

PENIS!!

So that when the world crumbles and the rivers stumble,
the earth will remember that we lived,
And reproduced,
And pissed into white marble basins that reflected it back onto our shins.



SEL- ECT WORKS

*specially selected for their merit and craftsmanship and reviewed by
University of Puget Sound Faculty to explore their intricacies*

1. *Silly Boy Shakes Hands with Quiet*

*by austin okopny,
reviewed by john wesley*

2. *B Cup*

*by hannah johnson,
reviewed by becky frehse*

3. *Game 7*

*by jack todd,
reviewed by suzanne warren*

Silly Boy Shakes Hands with Quiet

austin okopny

One.

A Chinese restaurant in the mountain fog:

The back of the joint they worship not Buddha or
Chairman Mao, but a fish- people both ancient
and volatile. Fish-people, gills, webbed feet.

The idol these Chinamen bow before has tentacles
in place of fingers, vacuums in place of hands.

These fish live in palaces down below the South China Sea, where
they grow large in their sunless cities,
feeding on the terror of losing their marbles within the
treacherous, sand-struck gulf.

Silly boy eats egg drop soup and pretends

that the kitchen has no telepathy, that the smells of his
shrimp kung pow isn't crustacean slime. Silly boy,
you are no match for a sacrifice to the depths of the Pacific.
And when the agoraphobia kicks in, the oxygen that leaves

your body like the Hebrews of Egypt, a regular exodus,
just remember to always hold your
horses.

Hold it long enough, Silly Boy, and you'll find for yourself what
kind of frogs or foul mermaid stench creeps in the dark. After all, they
have the power to move volcanoes, flood nations,
and they do get hungry, just like the rest of us.

Silly boy, eat your egg drop soup in peace.

No Kraken, no squid, no whale—
just the incredible race of Jonah.

And Jonah's race likes filet mignon just as much as the next guy.

Two.

So eat it in peace. Eat the egg- drop soup and when you're
tied up on a dock in San Francisco four hours later,
relishing your last meal,
you can look forward to an anti-Atlantis of giants laying eggs
and eating Silly Boy soup.

Look forward to the angler fish, the Leviathan, the endless night;
to the doubt in God, the Void, your
faith in the men in white.

Chinamen drive a small fishing boat into the mouthy Pacific,
place weights around your legs, and
toss

you overboard. The man that boiled your soup chants to it.
The woman that gave you water and shrimp
lights candles.
The world is at peace when Jonah is asleep.
Take one, it's for the team.

Three.

China can keep its Jonah, but worry not
about the Christian fish—
He requires no sacrifice of flesh, only sacrifice of self.
Sing to yourself a Leonard Cohen song your daddy used to sing to
you on his knee:

“Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water,
and he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden
tower. And when he knew for certain only
drowning men could see him, he said,
All men will be sailors then, until the sea shall free them!
But he himself was broken,
long before the sky would open, forsaken, almost
human, he sank
beneath your wisdom like a stone.”

Four.

The blood from the octopus
must swirl with the salt- water,
must become one with the salt- water,
be the salt-water.

Five.

To be a ring-bearer is to be a Christian,
To walk through the cavern-fire smoke is to
relinquish responsibility, but as angels do sometimes say,
“there are much fouler things than [ego]
In the deeper places of the world.”

Salvation is through humility,
 like we deserve those rose gardens,
those white marble columns, those fields and fields
of Elysian, of Atlantean, splendor.

To be a ring-bearer is to see,
to see the future in a pool of magic water
 from the South China Sea.
Witness the tentacle'd power of Jonah
against the sailor seer Christ.

Witness the pope torn to shreds in the face of Cthulu.

In the name of Cthulu.

Six.

Silly boy, can't you find justice in the swell
 of Pacific mouths?
A boy for Cthulu is like
a penny for a guy.

Wishing wells are connected by their plumbing.

Aqueducts drink with their intestines.
 Then there are always the teardrops, that
 touch the places only Jonah's Cthulu can reach.
 It's the Marianas, silly boy, make it your vacation spot.

You know that your daddy once read picture books aloud;
 and there was one – Jonah and the whale, and you,
 Silly boy, understood the principle of choice,
 loved how Jonah defied
 God's will. Jonah, king of the Oceanic, is the
 father of free-will.

Now construct for me a nautilus shell, golden portions on your
 silver plate.
 Not all gold is made to glitter, not in the tea-kettle gloom.

Out of the murk spawns Poseidon's sons, each one constructed
 as a nod to a primal fear in the dark.
 Swim not, silly boy, as the chance of fish-food increases below the
 stars.

Seven.

Your body
 must swirl with the sea-water,
 must become one with the sea-water,
 you will become the sea-water.

Eight.

The ocean is
 Quiet.

Austin Okopny's richly allusive "Silly Boy Shakes Hands with Quiet" is a blend of multiple narrative strands, the effect of which is not unlike staring into a bowl of egg-drop soup. Certainly, as postmodern pastiche, Okopny's poem seems to imitate and combine for irony rather than homage, and is in at least one respect about literature or the act of expression (a self-reflexivity most apparent when Silly Boy – made into soup – is sacrificed to the mouths of the poem's chief inspirations).

No tale stands on its own in "Silly Boy." The stories of Jonah, Christ, Tolkien, Freud, Cthulhu, even Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne," are vivid, dynamically interwoven, but perpetually truncated. We leave Christ on the cross, "forsaken" without the empty tomb; Frodo is still in the Mines of Moria; an "[ego]" barely exists before we are warned of id (there is a Freudian iceberg in this wonderfully briny poem); Jonah remains in the water, silent, his message to the Ninevites forever trapped in the belly of a whale. Thus, the poem adeptly demonstrates that intertextuality is anathema to ideas of origins and conclusions. Part one, for instance, asks the Cthulhu of part five to clarify the opening; yet if we are lulled into believing "Silly Boy" a poetic allegory of Lovecraft's cosmic indifference (even in the word "Chinaman" we hear Lovecraft's penchant for archaic – and racially offensive – language), the poem does so only to set up a pattern of fragmentation and multiplication: one Cthulhu becomes many "fish people."

Lovecraft believed that to see the universe as it really is – devoid of God, indifferent to humanity – is to experience true terror. But Okopny's Silly Boy "shakes hands" with the silent void, which suggests a routine meeting or reconciliation. Indeed, shaking hands with Quiet is the ending of all literature, the writer's final reconciliation with his work; and that the Quiet in "Silly Boy" has been met not in spite of, but because of the many voices it registers, the poem reinvestigates its sources, thereby foreshadowing the means by which its own voice may be heard long after the last word.

John Wesley is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, where he teaches courses on Renaissance literature and culture. Prior to his doctoral studies in Scotland, he served as editorial assistant at PRISM International, a creative writing journal published out of Vancouver. His published work reflects interests in rhetoric, performance, and the history of education.

B Cup

hannah johnson



Feminist scholars, art critics, and most women artists have consistently rejected the notion that gender specific attributes are inherent in art made by women. Nevertheless, B Cup, a lovely portrait of every college female's secret arsenal by Hannah Johnson is a painting that could only have been created by a woman who understands the importance and beauty of a perfectly sculpted bra. Johnson suspends an elegant, balconette form in front of a flat, greenish gray background to allow multiple cast shadows to dance around it in nimble variations of viridian. The rendering of light and shadow on the perfectly rounded cups is heightened by a decorative surface design of pink, white, and brown squiggles that resembles a Japanese cherry blossom motif. The artist's meticulous attention to the details of this subject includes a rhythmic pattern of delicate tucks on the impossibly thin straps that reach upward at slight diagonals to intersect the top half of the composition. A glaringly white fleck on the outside edge of the left strap indicates that the strap adjuster is healthily above the band suggesting that Johnson is not only a feminist, but also a realist.

*Becky Frehse, M.F.A.
Adjunct Faculty, Art Department*

Oil on canvas, 18"x 24"

Game 7

jack todd

The sweat trickled down his forehead. This was it. He was their clutch hitter, and there were two outs in the bottom of the ninth. His team was down, and he was their last hope.

Nick's teammates were completely silent as he convinced himself that this was nothing. It was just like he had practiced countless times before, but he could feel that his hands were clammy and nervous as he approached the plate, alone, isolated from everything.

In the moments before arriving at his destination, he thought carefully about the pitcher, trying to figure out what tricks he would pull. The fastball was always reliable and less risky than anything else in the armory, but it was an obvious move – easy to detect. Easy to counter. Then there was the curveball, which was more of an explosion, really. It was straightforward and consistent, but unexpected at a time like this. You blink and you miss it, and that's

the game. Not to mention the slider, which was powerfully tricky but much less consistent. It was a riskier move that didn't always work out so well for the pitcher, but when thrown well there was nothing you could do.

The screwball was deadliest, though. You rarely saw it thrown, but when it was, with its complicated set-up and turns, you couldn't defend against it, you couldn't prepare because you always realized it too late. Game over.

Behind him, Nick could hear his teammate warming up in the unrelenting heat, but he knew his practice was futile. If he didn't hit the homerun now, the game was over. He needed to make this count, otherwise they were all finished.

He noticed the sweat running down his face again. The hot wind of the desert made it worse and the hair on the back of his neck stood on end. Just like you've practiced, Nick thought. You've done this a million times before. This is no different.

When he reached the IED, he took a long look at the mix of wires attached here and there. He saw that there were four minutes left on the clock. Plenty of time, but the pressure remained. Game seven, he thought, and you're up to bat.

There were six wires of different colors connecting the various pieces of the explosive, which Nick inspected carefully while repeatedly wiping the sweat from his brow. He saw the pressure plates separated by a spacer and, beneath the tangle of wires, he saw the explosive shell itself.

He knelt low, inspecting every detail. He was the best defuser in the business: he was the clutch hitter.

The bomb kept ticking and when it reached two minutes, he

recognized the pitch. Fuck, he thought. Screwball.

The wires were tangled, haphazardly connected and lacking any obvious logic in their placement. Red was connected to yellow was connected to green was connected to more yellow. Suddenly, he thought he'd figured out how to stop it, so he breathed deep and cut the black wire connected to the blue and red wires.

Everything went silent. It was the calm before the storm.

In the instant before the explosion, as he heard the ignition mechanism click inside the bomb's casing, Nick thought of his family. He pictured his wife and son as well as his mom and dad standing with his brother, and he knew he would never see any of them again.

Two mornings ago he had woken up beside his wife. He remembered the sun shining in through the curtains, illuminating her face. She turned to him and put her hand on his cheek. "You're prickly," she said. "How'd you sleep?"

The memory faded. He was leaving for duty the next afternoon.

He couldn't remember the last time he had seen his parents. It had been ages, and now, in this instant, he realized that they would already know about his death by the time the man in uniform reached their door – his mom would have heard the SUV door slam outside their house at the end of the cul-de-sac. She would have looked outside with a grim understanding on her face. It was Nick's father who had taught him about baseball, his first true passion. Nick could see him staring despondently at his son's first bat, mounted on the wall above the TV, after hearing the news. Nick saw himself as a kid, holding that bat, playing ball with his dad in the backyard, which was just large enough to make the game feel real. Not cramped.

"Swing batta, batta, swing!" his father would say as he pitched to him and his brother. "Here comes the curveball, be careful – it's tricky."

It was in the same way that Nick had tried to teach his own son to play baseball. "You've got two strikes, pressure's on! Game seven, here comes the slider!"

The morning before his departure his son faked sick. He knew that his dad was leaving in the afternoon, so he pretended to have a fever because he wanted to stay home and convince him not to go. Nick and his wife knew he was faking and laughed at the poor job he was doing of staying in character, but they didn't care. They wouldn't have let him go to school anyway; they wanted him there for Nick's last day too. Secretly, Nick knew that his wife was hoping her son's tactics would work and that he wouldn't go. He knew she hated it when he left.

"See you soon," he could hear her saying with a despondent smile on her face as they said their goodbyes, "Give the other team hell out there."

In what remained of the last instant of his life, Nick was wishing he had bought in to his son's pleading, wishing that he had found a way to stay as his son tugged on his jacket, tears streaming down his face. "Please don't go, daddy."

He thought of the moments he had been happiest in his life; he saw himself hitting his first homerun; he heard the crowd screaming as he hit the final runner home during a championship game; he pictured the smile on his dad's face as he stole second base. The winner, though, was the day he gave his son his first baseball mitt and taught him how to throw.

Nick felt the spring breeze blowing on his face as his son's eyes

lit up at his new gift. His memory ran wild seeing his son throw the ball, intuitively bending his elbow and rotating his shoulder instead of merely catapulting it high into the air. His throw, his run, his catch, his eyes all had a wild excitement for the game, an excitement that Nick felt for it too, and an excitement only rivaled by the one that brought him where he was now, in the hot, lonesome, isolating desert. But as he saw these images in his head and realized he wanted nothing more than to wake up to his wife's shining face, to be able to play with his son one more time, the IED's explosion washed him away. Shrieks of terror from his teammates arose on the sideline out of the deafening silence as their clutch hitter turned his head and struck out for the first but final time. It was game seven, but the game was over.

Jack Todd's story "Game Seven," begins with a man at bat. Ah, the reader says. A baseball yarn. When a desert wind commences blowing and the stadium clock measures minutes to detonation, we find ourselves in far more frightening territory indeed. And when the ballplayer wakes on the morning of deployment, wife and young son by his side, the sorrow of his situation becomes abundantly clear. "Game Seven" is a baseball yarn wrapped around a war story framing a family drama enclosing an Ambrose Bierce-like tale of a man's last moments on earth. Like "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," or Tobias Wolff's "Bullet in the Brain," "Game Seven" is marked by radical interiority, a compressed time frame, and fluid shifts between past and present. What distinguishes "Game Seven" from its antecedents is its remarkable structure; Todd's story simultaneously suggests a set of Russian dolls and a Mobius strip. If "Game Seven" takes the form of nesting stories, these stories flip from inner to outer, from frame to canvas, within the space of a sentence. Consider: "The bomb kept ticking and when it reached two minutes, he recognized the pitch. Fuck, he thought. Screwball." Is this a story about baseball or bombs? It is not till tale's end that we learn which plotline occurs in flashback, which in the time of the story's telling.

"Game Seven's" quicksilver shifts in time and space are not merely for show. When Nick, the story's protagonist, plays ball with his son, he recognizes his own "wild excitement" and pleasure in the game, "only rivaled by the one that brought him [to] the hot, lonesome, isolating desert." For Todd, then, the appetite for baseball and war are linked. It is only when the bomb goes off that the innocence of the former is devastated by the rapacity of the latter.

Suzanne Warren is Visiting Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Puget Sound, where she teaches courses in fiction and the personal essay. She is new to Tacoma, and every day she is learning about rain.



The Woman With No Face

kate fujimoto

The woman with no face
haunts the sugar mill
and the cane field behind my house.
She likes to sit on the smokestack of the refinery
and comb her hair.
I hear her stamp her white feet
in the red dirt roads and laugh in her throat
curiously.

She drowns a boy in the irrigation ditch
every spring.
Her fingers spread over his dead face
like a school of pale fish.
She presses his eyelids closed with her thumbs.
She squeezes the bridge of his nose
until it breaks and bleeds over her hot palms.
She touches his mouth

his lips, his young teeth.
She hooks her fingers
into a notch behind his jawbone
and rips.

At night, I see her
walking under my clothesline,
trying on my dresses. Holding
their necklines against her long throat,
she points her elbow at my window
as if to smile. As if she knows
that when I meet a boy,
I have her hot palms;
my fingers are her school of fish.
She knows
my heart is a vacuum,
and when I meet a boy,
I pay attention to his mouth.





jane cornell – *untitled*

Epilogue

justine mcdaniel

Chapter One

We met, and we were young. Everybody was young once, so they understand that part. Everyone also always wants to go back to their youth. I already felt that way, and it had only been one year since high school graduation. Of course, I only felt that way because we met. I remember it all in sparkling detail, the fatigue and uncertainty of high school somehow fading into the background. I think of the good aspects over and over, skating dizzy spirals around a web of things I can't stop missing.

More often what keeps me wishing is not what I miss, but what I missed out on. Everyone has that one thing in the back of their mind, always and forever; this is it. He is it. I don't usually bring it up because it's too far away now, but I know I need to start at the beginning. Organized, calm. Compartmentalized, so it's not so hard to think about and also because I wish it felt still like a storybook tale. So, like I said, we met.

Chapter Two is negligible because I don't remember it. No one ever remembers how they become friends with someone; it just happens, and a month ago you were hoping you'd run into that new guy at your lockers and now you're making fun of your algebra teacher under your breath while he laughs and pulls at the curl of hair too

short to fit in your ponytail, just to annoy you. If you call that friendship.

Chapter Three

These were the months of pre. Everybody knows them well. Perhaps, technically, they extended over multiple years, but the first four months of junior year are the most important. I was pretty, he told Emma on the phone, and the next day at our lockers we made sure to say hi. This was when I started blushing. We sat across from each other in history class and my cheeks lit up whenever I answered questions. Ironic that the one thing I got from him and kept was the inability to hide my feelings, when what ruined us was my refusal to admit how I felt. Blushing never fails to belie my indifference. It annoys me, how ironic that is. High school relationships aren't supposed to have literary morals.

He and I stayed after class one day to look at the trigonometry problems further because we didn't understand, and afterwards I realized maybe it wasn't math that I hadn't understood. We worked on them until we figured it out and then we walked to lunch together and I carried those fifteen minutes around like a precious jewel clutched to my chest. I even liked quadratic functions when I was around him.

Chapter Four happened in New York City which was important because our drama class trip provided a stimulating break from high school, but mostly because he asked for my number when he found out I was leaving for a week. Then I came back and we wondered.

Chapter Five

"How was the trip?"

"It was so good. I loved New York."

"That's great! You thought you would."

"I know. I can't wait to live there."

Two smiles and two laughs, but secretly I couldn't wait, and secretly he didn't want me to think that far ahead. My mind was already in the big city, far away from the trials and tribulations of high school. I wanted to be gone, done, onto bigger and better. I didn't realize until too late that I might have already been there.

Chapter Six

We happened to park next to each other, happened to because James was already parked when I got to school and I purposely took the space next to his. I wanted to be getting in his car after school, not mine, and that made me feel how old we were getting. The first spring sun was in my eyes as he smiled at me over his green Volvo. I leaned against the driver's side door and agreed to go to the Thai restaurant even though I'd already had plans for Friday.

Chapter Seven

I looked over the top of my glass and wondered if this was what grown-up life was like, or maybe if it was what love was like. James grinned and we ate curry and took turns asking each other questions before we got caught up talking and forgot about asking. I usually have a large appetite.

Chapter Eight

We did homework at his house. Orchard, pool, kitchen out of



Martha Stewart. His parents were rich but they weren't home.

Chapter Nine we talked and talked and talked and finally

Chapter Ten it was like relief but sweeter, something ultimate, hot and cold and bigger than us; I couldn't stop explaining myself but then he let our lips tell the story.

Chapter Eleven happiness kept bubbling up like laughter, and I floated on it for the next weeks, month; I was buoyed through the treacherous waters of winter semester towards spring.

Chapter Twelve New Year's party at his house; I spent an hour talking to his grandparents and after everyone left we slipped out for a midnight walk in the orchard.

Chapter Thirteen I put a hand to his lips as he started to say "I love you." The words would sink us deeper, and I was already afraid of how much I had given him.

Chapter Fourteen Sadie Hawkins dance; I had a short blue dress and a flower in my hair and I was proud of him on my arm.

Chapter Fifteen We fought after the opening night of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; he was still dressed as Lysander as we yelled, stage makeup running down my face.

Chapter Sixteen What made me any different from everyone before? From my grandparents, Emma's family, Uncle Rob, the half

of American families broken by divorce? And from the girls that had come before me and whose heartbreak was the only reason I was able to date him now? It would end eventually, like everything, so I should be prepared, I should put a guard on watch in case of emergency

Chapter Seventeen but it was so pretty by the trees under the stars with nothing but our voices and our bodies in the wide, wide universe

Chapter Eighteen and even I knew that once we had started we couldn't

Chapter Nineteen stop because we were happy. Day after day we spent together entwining ourselves further until it truly did seem like the ball might never unravel

Chapter Twenty it seemed like that, but I was still afraid it might

Chapter Twenty-one why wouldn't it

Chapter Twenty-two isn't that what always happened it all unraveled in a Technicolor stream of forgotten yarn come to rest in an inanimate pile, yes, lifeless

Chapter Twenty-three that was what would happen

Chapter Twenty-four so what was the point I couldn't see it and if I didn't see him it made it easy not to try

Chapter Twenty-five I couldn't wait in fear for it to fall apart. I couldn't

Chapter Twenty-six

Chapters Twenty-seven through thirty do not exist because I am too embarrassed to remember them. If you call regret embarrassment, and usually I do because it's easier.

Chapter thirty-one should probably be part of another book because we didn't speak. Anything I did in chapter thirty-one is part of a different story, except the things I didn't say.

Chapter Thirty-two

I sat in physics and disregarded Mr. Rhodes' lecture on the Doppler Effect completely as I watched the last two weeks of us pour down in the torrential storm outside. There was no use concentrating, so I took the bathroom pass and left class, trying not to hope anything at all as I made my way across the field.

Chapter Thirty-two-and-a-half

Suddenly James was walking toward me, even though I couldn't believe it, and we argued, because he didn't believe me. I didn't believe myself, or anything I had said before, and the rain made me say so because it looked like tears on his cheeks and felt like loneliness on my back. After that, the rain didn't matter anymore because he was warm and I felt like home and I wouldn't make that mistake again.

The sun came out and the softball field turned to a glowing meadow where we frolicked between trigonometry problems and history tests and love, homework in my room and not homework in the orchard, love instead, and into summer of cars and pools, hikes and love, to be seniors, at the head of the school, love, on top of the world, love, love which I have never known.

Sorry. I couldn't resist. Chapter Thirty-three is where I always wake up, and when I must explain that Chapter Thirty-two-and-a-half is the chapter in which I do what I was not brave enough to do.

I know this makes you want to give up on the story now, which means I should too. But maybe giving up is relative. Maybe no one ever really gives up. There are always the whys, long after the story becomes irrelevant, although any question you could ask is too tired to be uttered aloud. My answers are tired, too, even though I keep saying them as if one day they'll be satisfying.

Chapter thirty-four means that I apologized many times in my own rainy thoughts but that, in reality, the last two months of our junior year stayed sunny. I didn't understand regret until too late. All my life, people told me I talked more than I should. I never thought I would hate my mouth so much for staying shut.

Chapter Thirty-five
Sometimes we want fiction so badly that we forget to want anything real, and I employ the first-person plural because I like to hope that you blame yourself for it, too, because hasn't everyone done this? Being less guilty might make me less regretful. If you call guilt

absolution which I wish I could.

Chapter Thirty-five was the future, but it has passed now.

What did you want me to say? I just wanted to apologize.



393 Minutes (Inside the Oregon State Insane Asylum) *crystal ingatowski*

12:00 a.m

She peels the skin off her bones
like an orange and watches
it spiral to the monochrome
linoleum floor. She removes
her freckles and scars, track
marks and bruises, and leaves
them lying there for the night
janitors to clean up.

2:27 a.m

Unmoving, she lies in bed.
Even the weight of the sheet
feels heavy on her raw skin,
but she passes the time by counting
her porcelain ribs like rosary beads,
muttering a thousand Fátima prayers
before the morning light hits.

6:32 a.m

The smell of bleach seeps through
her paper-thin door, and the frantic
whispers of nurses wake her up.

Did you get it all?

Did it leave a stain?

Don't worry, we can move some furniture around.

6:33 a.m

What do the janitors do with the patients'
remains? Do they leave them drowning
in buckets of water, or do they leave
them rotting in welded copper cans
in the basement for six decades?

She prays they take them home in nice
glass jars instead, carefully lining them up
on their mantles and worshipping
them every night, a thousand Hail Marys
before the morning light hits.





Another Shade of Blue

kristin brynsvold

My mother played the piano.

She was quite good, too. She played at Carnegie Hall when she was nine years old; at home, when I was a child, she played every day, right up until the day she ran away. But she might have played that day, too. I remember, in the early hours of the morning, being woken by the faint sound of music, the kind that was the color of the sun peeking through blinds and of a world that was half-asleep: light, delicate pink. It was the melody that wove through my mind that morning, that was too pretty to allow me to fall back into slumber, but too gentle to fully arouse me.

I don't remember how long I drifted through that lovely pink world, but I do know that when the music stopped, I felt as if I were waking up for the first time. I padded downstairs, small feet on bare wood. The piano was closed, picturesque in the sunlight, surrounded by swirling dust motes. The house felt still and quiet, but also different. There was a silence that felt permanent, as if it had moved in to stay. And I looked at the door, and saw that the small gold key, the one that had hung on the door's back for years, the one that unlocked the piano, was gone. I put my hand on the

piano lid. It was locked.

My mother was gone.

It was the day after my birthday. I was eleven years old, and my mother had left.

To say that my father played the piano would be a lie. The piano was not something he played, something that was his hobby or even his profession. The piano was his life. I often wondered how he had met my mother, how they had had me, since it would have been a distraction for him, something that would take him away from those white and black keys. He had started playing when he was two years old, his pudgy arms barely long enough to reach the keys. His parents found him a teacher who recognized talent and said he should be sent to a conservatory. So at five years old, his parents sent him to Germany. He came home during the summer, or at least to his home country, to music camps far away from his parents. They wrote him letters, but the message was clear: true talent knows no family. It is a lonely gift.

I was not allowed to play.

I grew up surrounded by the notes of the ivory, but I was not allowed to touch them. Once, I touched a key, pressed it down, and heard its high, clean note. My father was there in an instant, pulling me away. I think he was afraid that if I played I would be good, and I would be taken away from him as he was from his parents. He never knew how to be a father; it was not natural for him, and no one had ever shown him. My mother was better – better, but not unique. She bought me new clothes and cooked wonderful food, a skill she passed onto me, and she tucked me into bed at night. But I

was raised on a diet of hard work, music, and silence.

I distinctly remember the day my mother left. My father came and found me trying to open the piano, knowing it was futile. And he saw that the key was gone, and he knew, too.

For the next six months, the piano remained shut. I knew my father could find someone to fit a new key, and could not understand why he did not. So finally, frustrated by the silence, I opened the piano.

He was out, and I thought that if he could play again, or maybe just hear the music, he might smile again. So I picked the lock with a hairpin and carried a stool over so that I would be tall enough to lift the lid. Dust swirled off the board as I pushed it higher, securing it. I stood back and smiled, ready to wait for my father to come home. But the thought that had sat in the back of my mind for so long came forward, unbidden. What was so wrong about me playing the piano? It could hardly result in anything bad. I would not be sent away like my father had been. I sat down on the bench, not sure of what to do. I recalled something my father played quite often, an impromptu, and as if by their own volition, my hands lifted themselves up and began to play. And I was flying.

A million things swirled through my mind as I played: happiness, fear, release, but most of all, a thrilling exhilaration that sent adrenaline buzzing through my veins. I did not know how long I had been playing when my father was standing there, above me, his expression deadly.

His voice was soft and dangerous. “What,” he hissed. “Have I told you about playing the piano?”
I met his gaze. The music had given me courage. “You never said

anything,” I answered. “Ever.”

His face grew angrier. He grasped the back of my shirt and yanked me up. I cried out. He dragged me over the still-open door, where bags of groceries were splattered, as if they had been dropped. “Get out,” my father said, pushing me hard. “GET OUT.” And suddenly I was on the other side of the door.

I was eleven years old, and I was homeless.

I tried to go back. I pounded on the door for hours. I spent the night on the doorstep, and stayed there the next day, and the next, until I knew it was futile. I should have gone to the police, but I didn’t know then that they could help me. And I knew that my dad could be in trouble, and I was afraid of that. I had never met any of the few relatives that I had. I found a homeless shelter that fed me; never enough, but I grew used to it. I spent my days in the library, my nights in that shelter. Life was dull and gray, but I saw no alternative. The silence in my new life was not so different from that of my old life, and I never realized there was another way. When I was thirteen, a policeman found me, guessed enough of my situation, and took me to the police station. I told them my parents had died and I had no living relatives. When they asked for my name, I lied and told them it was Katrina. I don’t know why; the shocking pinkness of the name had always fascinated me and it seemed so different from who I was that I assumed no one would guess I wasn’t who I claimed to be. I was put in a foster home, one with a mother and father who were never there and less food than the homeless shelter. They didn’t care about me, but I did go to school. I was safe and I was educated and I had what I needed to survive.

After I had been in the foster home for a year, I stumbled across a music store on a corner of an old, abandoned street. I wandered in and asked if I could play a piano. I had not played one in so long, and I could feel the music calling to me, felt my fingers tingling and tried without success to hold them still. When the store owner showed me to a dusty old grand, I had a sudden flashback to home, and to all the trouble that piano playing had caused. Then the owner asked me if I’d like any music, and I said I didn’t know how to read music, but I’d just like to play. And so, previous thoughts banished from my head, I sat down at a piano for the second time and began playing. This time I played nothing that I knew. I simply let the music run from my fingertips and swirl around me, blues and greens and whites that reminded me of the sea.

I returned many times after that, eventually coming every day after school to live in the music. I taught myself to read notes. When I was sixteen, the store owner, who rarely said a word to me, showed me an application for a summer music program in New York, not far from our native Connecticut. I recorded forty-five minutes of my playing, wrote an essay, and filled out an extensive application for the Nantucket Piano School. It was, I learned, very prestigious, and very difficult to get into; only twelve students were accepted from around the world. I mailed the packet in December, my Christmas present to myself, and waited. I did not have high hopes. I had been playing only three years, and no matter how much I might have loved it, love could not compete with years of lessons and hard work. I had also lied on most of the application, forging medical records and my father’s name. The only thing I had been honest about were finances; my foster family had no money,

and would not have let me go if they did. The only money I had saved I planned on using for a train ticket to New York. I needed a scholarship, or I wouldn't be able to go.

By the time April rolled around, I had almost forgotten about the application. School was finishing for the year and I had just found a record with a wonderful Beethoven sonata, one with yellows and blacks and dark browns that played through my mind. I longed to capture it perfectly, and so my mind was full of fingerings and dynamics and tempos, things I could change to make it better. I had little space for much else. So when I pulled the mail from its box and found a large envelope addressed to me – enough of a rarity – I was startled and more than a little confused. Then I glanced at the return address and recognized it. With shaking fingers, I opened the envelope and pulled out the letter.

I held the future in my fingertips.



jill sanford – *Basket Weaving: Self Portrait*

Braided Rivers

juliette witous

Silver seeping veins of
River's braided chains
Footprint of falls streak dark stains
Ferns fall over sacred caves
Green fronded leaves, speckled dark purple fray
Contrasting in radiant array
Brick red, indigo, green mosses lay
Marking years of nature's stay



liza holtz – *Fairy Tea Party*

Poem #638
(A Collaborative Effort)
jared stoltzfus

I am naked
You are naked
Your chest looks like the sea.

